(19) 19

A

DISCOURSE

ABOUT

CONSCIENCE,

Relating to the

Present Differences

AMONG US.

In Opposition to both *Extreams*

OF

POPERY and *FANATICISM.*

LONDON,

Printed for *William Crooke*, at the *Green Dragon* without *Temple Bar*, next *Devereux Court.* 1684.

A

DISCOURSE

ABOUT

CONSCIENCE, &c.

THE Design of this short Discourse, is to treat about the Nature and Office of *Conscience*, how, or in what respect it doth oblige; which, as it appears by the Practice of some Men, laying Claim thereunto, hath been either grosly mistaken, or wilfully abused: But be it either one way, or other, I am sure it has been made the common Cloak and Excuse for some of the greatest Disorders, and unwarrantable Proceedings, not only against the peaceable Communion of our Church, but the legal, and well-established Government of the State. Now if these few Lines, charitably offered, may conduce any thing toward the rectifying of such Mistakes, and consequently the preventing the like Abuses in any that are willing to be undeceived, I have all the End I aim at; if not, I shall have however this Satisfaction, that what I have here offered towards it, is done with all the Kindness and Charity that possibly I could, without betraying the Cause I have undertaken, or doing Injury to that Church, whose Communion I have here took Occasion to recommend, and plead for: And therefore

without any tedious Preface, or fruitleſs Apology, I ſhall addreſs my ſelf to the Subject in hand, and that in a very plain and impartial manner.

Now in my Diſcourſe hereupon, I ſhall ſhew you,

Firſt, What *Conſcience* is, or what is included in the Notion of it.

Secondly, What it is to live up to *Conſcience*.

Thirdly, That notwithſtanding *Conſcience*, by many perſons pretending to it, hath been, and is ſtill abuſed, yet ought not to be neglected, or laid aſide.

Fourthly, What things *Conſcience* ought chiefly to be concerned for, or exerciſed about.

Fifthly, To offer a few things by way of Advice, concerning the governing of our ſelves, with relation to our *Conſciences*.

From whence you may perceive, that I intend to ſpeak of *Conſcience*, not ſo much as it relates to Matters of *Doctrine*, as to Matters of *Practice*; not how it ought to form our *Judgments* and model our *Opinions*, as how it ought to direct our *Lives*, and govern our *Actions*, which is much more neceſſary of the two.

1. WHAT is meant by *Conſcience*, which is almoſt in every one's Mouth, and hath created ſo much *Noiſe* and Buſſle in the World.

Conſcience is that Power, or Faculty of the Mind, which judges of our Actions according to a right Rule, whether they be agreeable to it or not; or 'tis the *reflex Act* of our Reaſon and Underſtanding, reſpecting the Goodneſs or Badneſs of our Actions; ſo that *Conſcience* is an Act of the *Underſtanding*, and but another Name for *Reaſon:* 'Tis *Reaſon* exercis'd about the Lawfulneſs, or Unlawfulneſs of what we do; or the Judgment of our Minds, acquitting, or condemning us in our own Thoughts.

In

In which Deſcription of *Conſcience*, we may take Notice of theſe following things, which enter the Definition, and conſtitute the Nature of it.

Firſt, *Conſcience* ſuppoſeth a Rule by which it ought to be directed and governed in all its Actings; for *Conſcience* is no Lordly, nor Lawleſs Principle, and therefore is not left at Liberty to think or do what it liſt, to act raſhly, and at all Adventures. No, *Conſcience* is under Authority and Reſtraint, and ought to be kept within Bounds, and not ſuffered to run out into an unaccountable Extravagancy, or violent Extream; to keep its Eye daily on the *Rule*, and take *Advice* from thence in what it doth for God, whoſe *Will* ought to be a Law in this Caſe, and none elſe. And that, be ſure, is a Rule large enough for *Conſcience* to walk by; and which, together with Judgment and Diſcretion in the Application thereof, is ſufficient to direct a Chriſtian upon all occaſions.

Secondly, There muſt be a *Knowledge* of this Rule, otherwiſe *Conſcience* is not concern'd.

The very Notion of the Word, according to the Letter and Derivation of it, Συνείδεσις in *Greek*, and *Conſcientia* in *Latine* imports as much. There cannot be *Conſcientia* without *Scientia*, no Conſcience without Knowledge. If I am wholly ignorant of the Rule or Law, 'tis all one to me, as if there were none at all; and obligeth me no further than I have or may have any Knowledge or Information thereof; in this Sence, *Quod non apparet, non eſt*, 'Tis all one not to be, as not to appear ſo.

I muſt therefore know what my Duty is, or what it is the Law requires of me, before I can think my ſelf obliged thereby; and till I know it, or have the Means of arriving at the Knowledge of it, I lie under no Obligation from thence: For a blind Man may with

with as much Reaſon be oblig'd to walk ſteadily in a ſtreight Line, or narrow Path, tho he cannot ſee one Step of his way, as that a man ſhould be oblig'd in Conſcience to any *Law*, whereof he is totally ignorant, or deprived of the means of knowing of it. I ſpeak here of *invincible*, not *affected* Ignorance, there being as much difference between them two, as between natural and wilful Blindneſs, between a man's having no Eyes at all, and another that ſhuts them cloſe, and will not open or make uſe of them to ſee his way. The former excuſeth indeed; but the later never did, and never will. For inſtance, thoſe miſerably blind *Heathen*, who ſit in Darkneſs, and ſee no Light, who never heard of the Name of Chriſt, nor once had the glad Tidings of Salvation preached unto them; they are not bound to believe and embrace the Goſpel under the Penalty of Damnation, as we are, who enjoy the means, and daily ſit under the joyful Sound thereof. All that they are to do, is to comply with the rational Dictates of their own Mind, and conform to that part of the Divine Law which is written upon their Hearts, and to live up to the light of natural Religion: The ground or reaſon of which *Hypotheſis* is taken from that of the Apoſtle, *Rom.* 2. 14, 15. *For when the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by Nature the things contain'd in the Law, theſe having not a Law, are a Law unto themſelves:* Which ſhews the work of the Law written in their Hearts, their *Conſciences* alſo bearing them Witneſs, and their Thoughts in the mran time *accuſing*, or *excuſing* one another. Now according to this of the Apoſtle, *If the Gentiles do by Nature the things contain'd in the Law*, and their Conſciences thereupon excuſe and bear witneſs on their behalf (as is here expreſly affirm'd) why ſhould we be ſo uncharitable as to paſs Sentence againſt thoſe who

who are acquitted by their own *Conſciences*, or think that the Great and Good God, who is the Maker of us all, will be as partial and ſevere as we are wont to be in our Cenſures of them. No, for we are told *in every Nation, he that fears God, and works Righteouſneſs ſhall be accepted*, Acts 10. 35. This Propoſition of the Apoſtle, being, no doubt, true in every Age, as well before, as after Chriſt's Time, there being but one way of Salvation both for Jew and Gentile, and but one Mediator between God and Man, who is called *the Saviour of all Men, tho' more eſpecially of ſuch as believe*, *i. e.* of Chriſtians; no other name being given among Men, no other Mediator being conſtituted throughout the World beſide him, where by they can hope to be ſaved, *Acts* 4. 12. tho' how and in what manner the Merit of Chriſt is applyed, unto them that have no explicite Knowledge or Faith in him, is a Myſtery too high for our Reach; and therefore, as a ſecret thing, belongs only to God.

The meaning of all that hath been ſaid upon this particular, is in ſhort this, That there muſt be not only a Rule, but a Knowledge of that Rule before it can oblige *Conſcience*.

Thirdly, There is the Judgment of the Mind concerning our Actions, a judging of them by a known Rule, of what Kind or Nature they are, whether good or bad, well or ill done, agreeable to the Intent of the Law or not. From whence ariſeth in the

Fourth place, The giving, or paſſing Sentence upon our ſelves, in reference to the Lawfulneſs, or Unlawfulneſs of our Actions; the acquitting, or condemning our ſelves in our own Breaſts, and judging of our Spiritual State, or moral Condition, whether we are able to approve our ſelves unto God, who is the ſtrict Obſerver, and ſupream Judge of all our Actions.

And

And from these two last Acts results the Testimony of our Consciences; which if it vote on our Behalf, yields us matter of Comfort in the midst of all our Sufferings, enables us to hold up our Heads with Joy, and gives us Confidence towards God, whereby we may *draw near with a true Heart, in full assurance of Faith, having our Hearts sprinkled from an Evil Assurance, and our Bodies washt with pure Water*, Heb. 10. 22. And again, *Beloved, if our Hearts* (that is, our Consciences) *condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God*, 1 John 3. 21.

But if the Testimony of Conscience make against us, then it cannot chuse but afflict and disquiet us, make our Countenances to fall, and cause sad thoughts to arise within us; which in some men is attended with greater Horror than in others, according as Conscience is awakened, or laid to sleep.

The whole Transaction of *Conscience* in this Affair, is sometimes represented by way of *Syllogism*, in three Propositions.

That which forms the first *Proposition*, is called Συντήρεσις: This makes Report of the Law, and draws its *Medium*, or Argument from thence.

That which forms the *Minor*, is called Συνείδησις, or *Conscience*: This makes a particular Application of the Law, or Rule unto a Man's own self, or brings it home to his own Case.

The Third infers the *Conclusion* from both, and is therefore called Κρίσις, which is the Judgment of *Conscience* upon the whole; whereby a man is able to judge of his Actions, and pass Sentence upon himself, either of Absolution, or Condemnation.

Having resolved the first Enquiry, What *Conscience* is? it will from hence more easily appear in the next place.

2. WHAT

2. WHAT it is to make Conſcience of our Actions, or to live according to Conſcience.

Negatively, 'Tis not to do what we liſt, to walk at large, or live at randome, 'tis not to be tranſported with Humour, or Paſſion, or Diſcontent. 'Tis not to act in Conformity to the Opinions of other Men, or of a particular Sect or Party as ſuch; no nor always to follow the Dictates and Perſuaſions of our own prejudic'd and mis-inform'd Minds, whereof, notwithſtanding, ſome People are ſo very fond, as to make no difference between *Conſcience* and *Prejudice*.

Wherefore poſitively; To act according to Conſcience, is to walk by Rule, and live according to Law; to frame all our Actions according to the Will and Direction of our Maker, who hath abſolute Authority over us, and claims a greater Share in us, than we can in our ſelves: For Conſcience is under Authority, ty'd to a Rule, and muſt have a Law for its Direction and Governance.

Now when we perform our Actions in ſuch a manner as may be agreeable to the Rule which is given us for the right Government thereof; and when the general Practice of our Lives bears ſome Proportion thereunto; this is to make *Conſcience* of our ways, and to approve our ſelves *to our ſelves* in ſo doing.

That man therefore that hath no reſpect to the Rule of his Actions, nor takes any care to render them in ſome good meaſure anſwerable to it; ſuch a one (let his plea and pretence be never ſo ſpecious and demure) makes no *Conſcience* how he lives, and conſequently can never expect the Teſtimony of Conſcience on his ſide, much leſs be able to Rejoyce in it.

Now the chief Rule or Law that is to direct *Conſcience*, and govern our *Actions*, is the *Canon* of *Holy*

Scripture, the written Word, or reveal'd Will of God. This lays the ſtrongeſt, nay, the only Obligation upon *Conſcience*; which can acquit us no farther, than our Actions are correſpondent to this Rule; and unto which all others are ſubordinate, and may be applied.

So that to live according to *Conſcience*, is to meaſure out our Actions by the Rule of God's Word; to conform the General Practiſe and Courſe of our Lives unto the Law of Chriſt, which is the moſt perfect Rule of Righteouſneſs, that is, or can be given us, and unto which all others ought to refer: 'Tis to live in Obedience to a Divine Command, and to ſubject our ſelves entirely to the Will and Pleaſure of him, who hath the abſolute Diſpoſe and Government of our *Conſciences*, and to whom we owe all the Duty and Service we are capable of. He that doth otherwiſe doth amiſs, and can never be able to juſtifie himſelf unto his own Mind, much leſs anſwer it to God when he cannot do it to his own Conſcience.

From what hath been ſaid, it appears, that *Conſcience* is, as I ſaid before, no lawleſs or ungovernable Principle, no prejudic'd, or diſcontented Paſſion, no affected, or ſuperſtitious Impulſe, *&c.* as ſome would make us believe: 'Tis no Tyrannical, or Deſpotick Lord, ſo as to impoſe its own private Dictates for Divine Commands; much leſs the wild Extravagancies, and enthuſiaſtick Conceits of this or that Sect, under pretence of Religion, whereof Inſtances have not been wanting in this Nation and Age of ours. Conſcience is God's Subſtitute and Vicegerent, and can act or impoſe no further than it hath Warrant or Authority from him ſo to do: To do more than this, is to exceed its Commiſſion, and to

do

do that which all the fine Pretences in the World will never be able to bear us out in.

3. NOTWITHSTANDING, *Conſcience*, by many perſons pretending to it, hath been wretchedly Abuſed, yet it ought not to be ſlighted, or caſt off ever the more upon that Account.

Now this implies two things.

Firſt, It ſuppoſeth that *Conſcience* may be abuſed; nay, actually hath been ſo; and that to very ill Purpoſes: And this is too great a Truth ever to be denied, and which ſad Experience doth every day give us too manifeſt and undeniable a Proof of.

To inſtance only in Generals; Many there are, and God knows how few amongſt us can plead *Not Guilty* in this reſpect, who have cried up Religion, and pleaded Conſcience; yet have had no regard to the Laws of the one, or Rule of the other, who, 'tis to be fear'd, never took any pains to examine and ſearch into the Nature and Reaſon of their Actions, whether they were agreeable to the mind of God, or had any Command of his, to Warrant and Authorize them.. Conſcience in ſuch Perſons had never regard to any Law but that of their own Paſſions and Intereſts, which hath put them upon many notorious and foul Impieties, and which have been firſt practiſed, then excuſed, and at length arrived at that heighth of Confidence, as publickly to be maintain'd and juſtified in the face of the whole World; and that under the name and plea of *Conſcience*, notwithſtanding they were directly oppoſed to the common Dictates of Nature, and expreſs Laws of Chriſtian Religion.

Thus among the Heathen, *Conſcience* through blindneſs and ſuperſtition, hath miſ-lead them to many vile, and unnatural pieces of wickedneſs; and among Chriſtians, who ought to have known and done better,

it hath been guilty of little less. The most Tragical Crimes that ever came upon the Stage, have been acted under this Veil, and disguised with this Pretence.

This it was which put *Agamemnon* upon sacrificing his Daughter, and urg'd his Son *Orestes* to revenge his Father's Death in the Murder of his Mother. This mov'd the *Carthaginians* to the Slaughter of two 100 young Noblemen at a time, to appease their surly God *Saturn*, after a notable Defeat received from their Enemies. And upon this account it became a common Practice among several Nations, to offer up their Children in Sacrifice to their Idols; which *Abomination of the Heathen*, as the Holy Scripture calls it, *was afterward imitated by the backsliding Israelites, who burnt their children to* Moloch, *and made them pass through the fire in the valley of* Hinnon, 2 Chr. 28. 3. And it was *Conscience* mingled with Spite and Malice, that moved their Countrey-men in after-Ages to crucifie the Lord of Life, and put him to open Shame and Death: For, say they, *we have a Law, and by that Law he ought to die*, &c. John 19. 7.

And well had it been, if this *Abomination* had been confin'd to the Heathen World, or past no further than the Borders of the *Jewish* Nation: But which is more to be aggravated and lamented too, Christians of almost all Parties and Persuasions, have not come behind the very worst of the *Heathens*, acting over again all the Extravagancies of a *Pagan* Superstition, and that for *Religion* and *Conscience* sake, if they may be believ'd.

This hath created Factions, and sown Sedition both in Church and State; invaded Kingdoms from abroad, and incited to Rebellion at home, contrived Plots, and hatch'd Conspiracies, acted Treasons, and committed Massacres, and absolved Subjects from their Allegiance,

Allegiance, and made them caſt off the Yoke of Obedience to their Lawful Soveraigns.

Whatever Miſchief or Wickedneſs is or can be implyed in the Name of *Rebellion*, and *Murder*, *Sacriledge*, or *Treaſon*, *Ambition*, and *Revenge*, they have all been the Dictates of ſome Mens *Conſciences*, and proceeded from the *Oracle* of a deluded and miſtaken Religion. Under this pretence ill Men have cheriſhed their Natural *Infirmities*, let looſe their *Paſſions*, vented their Spleen, diſguiſed their Ambition, promoted their own private Intereſt to the Ruine of the Publick, and carried on the worſt deſign of a Spiteful Nature and Diſcontented Faction.

Now *Conſcience* in ſuch Men as theſe was *Legibus Soluta*, had no reſpect to *Laws*, unleſs it were to break and violate them, being *Lawleſs*, and *Diſobedient*, &c. 1 *Tim.* 1. 9.

Such a Conſcience as this can as eaſily break all Bands, and cut in ſunder all the Cords of Obedience as *Sampſon* did the Cords, wherewith his *Enemies* had bound him: And when once the Tie of *Conſcience* is loos'd or broken, little hopes of their being held by any other.

But we know very well, from whence the Principles of ſuch a *Conſcience* came at firſt, and what Miſchief and Confuſion it hath wrought in all parts of *Chriſtendom* ever ſince. Whoever therefore is acted thereby, whether they know it, or no, yet for certain they are no better than Factours for *Popery*, the Tools and Engines of a *Jeſuite*, and the very Spawn of the *Fiſherman* of *Rome*, actuated by a Spirit wholly Oppoſite to that of Chriſt and his Goſpel: A Spirit, that like the Evil One is ever reſtleſs and unquiet, which hath been formerly at work, and no doubt is ſo ſtill, though like their Predeceſſors in the *Powder-Plot*,

Plot, they dig under ground in a more Secret and Clandeſtine manner, endeavouring not only to create Jealouſies and Diſcontents, but contriving and laying Snares to involve us in the like unnatural Guilt and *Treachery* with themſelves: For it is well known, the *Papiſts* have Leaven'd moſt of our Sects, and under their Mask and Diſguiſe have Oppugn'd our Church, ſow'd the Tares of Faction and Diſſention among us, and arm'd her Boſome Friends, (which are evermore the worſt of Enemies) with Weapons and Arguments to undermine and weaken her.

And really when I conſider the great Impoſture of that Corrupt Church, and the vaſt numbers that have been craftily ſeduc'd and miſlead by her, who under the Plea of *Conſcience*, and Out-cry of Religion have acted ſo many Barbarous and unhumane Cruelties, 'tis enough (methinks) to make a Serious Man to forſwear all *Conſcience*, and for ever Abjure all thoughts of Religion, were he not very well aſſured of the *Abuſe* of the one and *Innocence* of the other, and how none but the very worſt of Men have made thoſe Holy Pretences a Retreat for their Wicked and Abominable Practices.

Good God! That any who pretend to *Conſcience* and *Religion*, and not only ſo, but to *Conſcience* in its greateſt Strictneſs, and to *Religion* in its higheſt Purity, ſhould yet ſo notoriouſly abuſe the one, proſtitute the other, and act in Contradiction to both. If this be to make *Conſcience* of our Actions, it is in ſuch a manner as no Good Man would be deſirous of; and if this be *Religion*, I plainly declare, I have none of this kind, and do heartily wiſh I never may.

If *Conſcience*, and conſequently *Chriſtianity*, is the Refuge of Treaſon, and Sanctuary of Rebellion, if the

the Holy Jesus came (as one would think by some Mens Practices he did) to Sanctifie Murder, and Canonize those Men whose hands are full of Bloud, to Licence Sacriledge and Sedition, or Legitimate the most leud and Infamous Impieties, I should chuse rather to be a Disciple of Honest *Socrates*, and content my self to be virtuous at the rate of a Heathen, than according to the Measures of such a Religion.

But blessed be God, we know better things, and have been taught quite otherwise, we have not thus learned Christ; his Religion is Pure Religion and Undefiled; his Commands are Holy, Just, and Good; he countenanceth no sort of Immorality, but encourageth the Universal Practice of all Virtue. It threatens Damnation to such as resist Authority, which is *the Ordinance of God*, and affirms the Damnation of those Men to be just, who *think to do evil, that good may come of it.* Rom. 3. 8. It makes it as necessary for Subjects to submit (I do not say always to Obey) but to submit to their Governors, as for Children to be Obedient to their Parents, and for Servants to be subject to their Masters; and he that goes about to take off the Obligation of the one, may upon the same terms take away all Duty in Children towards Parents, and all Faithfulness in Servants towards Masters: For Obedience and Subjection to Civil Government, is as Natural and Sacred, as that which is exercis'd in Families, and kept up in a Man's own House.

I have insisted the longer on this, not so much to look backward as forward; to undeceive people by opening their Eyes and discovering those *Pious Frauds*, *Profane Cheats*, and *Hypocritical Abuses*, which for a long time hath past cleverly with some Men, under the

the Notion of *Conſcience* and *Religion*; and to ſhew you what Spirit ſuch Men are of, thereby to Caution you for the future againſt all ſuch leud *Principles* and *Pretences*, how ſpeciouſly ſoever they may be gilded over, and that *you take heed, that* you ſuffer not your ſelves to be cheated out of a *Peaceable*, *Loyal*, and *Well-temper'd* Religion, by any bold Incendiary or cunning Hypocrite of them all, be they of what *Party* or *Faction* they will, whether *Foreign* or *Domeſtick*, at Home or Abroad. But yet in the

Second place, Notwithſtanding *Conſcience* hath been ſo groſly miſtaken and abuſed; yet it ought not to be ſlighted, much leſs caſt off upon that account, any more than Religion which hath often met with the like hard Fate, or Civil Government which hath been Uſurp'd by thoſe that had no Right to it, and manag'd quite contrary to the *Primitive End* and *Inſtitution* thereof.

Now if the Abuſes of *Government* and *Religion* be not a ſufficient Reaſon for our rejecting of them, no more is it for the laying aſide of *Conſcience*. Becauſe the greateſt Abuſe can never be made an Argument for the Total *Abandoning* thereof.

For if you come once to caſt off *Conſcience*, you throw off with it all Obligation to Duty, you take away all Senſe of *Good* and *Evil*, all Difference between *Virtue* and *Vice*, *Right* and *Wrong*, and thereby reduce *Mankind* into the Rank of *Brute-beaſts*.

Without regard to *Conſcience* you are not capable of *Religion*, nor of the ordinary Duties of *Morality*, we cannot do one good Action without it, nor rejoyce in the Witneſs and Teſtimony thereof.

There will be then no peace in *Private Families*, nor good Government in *Publick Societies*; no Obedience to Magiſtrates nor Subjection to Authority.

No

No Man then will either Fear God or Honour the King; or do their Duty one toward another, all which are yet enjoyn'd and bound expreſsly upon our *Conſciences*, by the Holy Spirit.

Conſcience then is uſeful and neceſſary in that it implys an Obligation to Duty, and lays upon us the ſtrongeſt Bonds of Obedience. There is no Argument or *Perſwaſive* like it: It is ſtronger than all our little Hopes and Fears in this World; 'tis not to be compell'd by force, nor brib'd by *Intereſt*, nor frighted by all the Terrors and Apprehenſions of Death and the Grave. Inſomuch, as *Conſcience*, though daily abuſed by ill Men to ill deſigns, is yet of excellent uſe, where rightly inform'd, duly apply'd, and carefully heeded and attended unto. Where it is Reverenc'd and regarded as it ought, it tends mightily to the making Men throughly Good and Virtuous, Juſt in their *Pretences*, Honeſt in their *Intentions*, Upright and Sincere in all their *Promiſes* and *Profeſſions*; all which, where Men make no Scruple of any thing, muſt needs be Falſe, Diſſembling, and Treacherous.

Where Men are willing to exerciſe a good *Conſcience*, or keep it void of Offence, they will not put Tricks and Cheats upon themſelves or others, they will not go about to mock God and deceive their own Souls, they will ſcorn to do an ill Action and afterwards colour it over with a plauſible Excuſe or Hypocritical Evaſion. But will endeavour after the practice of unfeignee Goodneſs, a hearty Compliance with their whole *Duty*, having their *Converſation*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *In* Simplicity *and* Godly Sincerity, *and not with Fleſhly Wiſdom.* 2 Cor. 1. 12. In a word, he will ſtrive to approve himſelf to God as well as

Man, and to Man as well as God; that he may become as good as possibly he can, that is, as the Grace of God and his own honest endeavors will enable him to be.

That Man therefore, that makes no *Conscience* of any thing he does or says, can never become so good as he ought; He can be no true and lasting Friend either to Church or State, to his King or Countrey, and consequently unsafe to be trusted by either; but he that shall go about to *Debauch* and *Prostitute* his *Conscience*, is of all others the very worst, and no Sinner to the *Conscientious* Sinner, who can sin with a good *Conscience*, and do Evil that Good may come of it, whose *Damnation* as it is most just, so their reclaiming is most difficult, as being obstinate in their *Prejudices* against every thing, that is or can be offered for their Conviction.

And thus you see the great Use and Necessity of *Conscience*, where it is regarded and valued as it ought, and therefore is not to be decry'd, for the ill use made thereof: For to cast off *Conscience* is in effect to cast off all Religion with it; to Banish all true Goodness, Common Honesty, and Moral Virtue out of the World, and consequently all that Order, Peace, Union, and Civil Society, which results from thence, and wherein the Happiness of this Life doth chiefly consist.

I PROCEED now in the *Fourth* place, to shew in or about what things *Conscience* ought principally to be concern'd or exercised.

First, For the better understanding of which, I must remind you a little of what I have already hinted in the description of *Conscience*, namely, that *Conscience* presupposeth a Rule or Law; and therefore is not particularly concern'd about things *Indifferent* as such,

ſuch, which come within the compaſs of no Rule, nor within the Limits of any Command or Prohibition. For *Conſcience* is no further concern'd about any thing or action, than as 'tis an Inſtance of Obedience to, or Tranſgreſſion of a Law; now where there is no *Law*, there is no *Tranſgreſſion*, no nor *Obedience* neither.

Now the things we call Indifferent are ſuch as God hath given no particular Command either for or againſt, and upon that account become of a Middle nature between Good and Evil, as being neither commanded nor forbidden; if therefore not commanded, they do not oblige *Conſcience* in point of Obedience; if not forbidden they offend not *Conſcience* in point of Guilt.

This is the true and eaſie Notion of things *Indifferent*, as coming under no immediate Injunction or Prohibition, and therefore left free as to the Performance or Omiſſion, unleſs Prudence ſhall otherwiſe direct or lawful Authority interpoſe.

But ſome there are, who will admit nothing for Indifferent, but what Scripture doth expreſly warrant and affirm to be ſo; but then there can be nothing call'd Indifferent in the World, becauſe there is no Text throughout the whole Bible, that ſpeaks any thing to this purpoſe, or makes mention of what is Indifferent and what not; And yet that ſome things in or about Religion are indifferent, and may be done or not done without Sin, we have the general conſent of moſt of our Reformed *Divines*; and that as well of Foreign Churches as of our own.

Calv. Beza, Bucer, Pola. P. Martyr cum pluribus aliis, quos omnes enumerare jam tæderet.

'Tis therefore ſufficient warrant for me to judge any thing indifferent, whereof the Scripture is wholly ſilent and makes no mention at all, either one way or other, as in Matters of External *Rites* and *Ceremonies*,

the Outward Modes and Circumſtances of *Divine* Worſhip, which are all of them, of an indifferent Nature, and wherein there is no Religion or Sin at all, as conſider'd abſolutely in themſelves, and ſtript of all other Circumſtances, which may alter the caſe.

Indifferent things therefore being neither good nor evil in themſelves, may be done, or not done, without ſinning againſt God, or offending *Conſcience.*

But when theſe things, which are indifferent in their own Nature, do either tend to, or come under the General Rules of Order and Decency, and have withal the Addition of lawful Authority to re-commend them; then the Practice of them becomes not only lawful, but in that reſpect neceſſary, tho' they remain ſtill indifferent as to their own Nature. I ſay, tho' the Nature of them is not changed by the *ſuper-addition* of lawful Authority, but remain indifferent as before, yet the Practice of them is no longer ſo; but becomes a neceſſary Inſtance of our Obedience; and therefore Obſtinacy in refuſing to comply with ſuch Injunctions, cannot excuſe from Guilt, except it could be proved, *That Diſobedience to the lawful commands of the Magiſtrate is no Sin, and the ſtudy of the Churches Peace and Quiet is no Duty.*

For the clearer Illuſtration of this, I ſhall inſtance but in one Ceremony at preſent, which by many is ſcrupled at; but, I think, without any Ground, either from *Scripture*, or *Reaſon*; and that is, *Kneeling* at the Bleſſed *Sacrament*, which is the only Ceremony that is enjoyn'd or requir'd from the Layety in the Communion of our Church. 'Tis impoſſible we ſhould receive the Holy *Sacrament* without ſome Geſture which is natural to every Action, whether it be *Sitting*, *Standing*, *Kneeling*, or *Leaning*, *i. e.* inclining the Body on one ſide, which is generally thought

to be the Posture of our Saviour and his Disciples, at the first Institution thereof, according to the Custom of the *East*. Each of these Postures considered in themselves are equally indifferent, and one to be scrupled no more than another, because they are all of them natural to bodily Action. *Kneeling* therefore in the *First* place being not forbidden in Scripture, is no more unlawful than *Sitting* or *Standing*; and being a natural Gesture of the Body, is as indifferent as any of the rest: But then *Secondly*, as it is a devout Posture, and expressive of greater Reverence and Humility than that of Sitting or Standing; so it may be preferr'd as more convenient and suitable to the Piety and Devotion of that *Holy Ordinance*, than any other Gesture.

But *Thirdly*, As 'tis enjoyn'd by the Authority and Governours of the Church (whose Power in things of this Nature, some men are unwilling to understand) so it becomes more necessary and binding as to the Use thereof: What was indifferent before in one respect, becomes convenient in another, and necessary in a third: 'Tis *indifferent* in its own nature, because not forbidden: 'Tis *convenient*, in regard of its natural Significancy, as *betokening* more Reverence and Devotion; and 'tis necessary, in respect of the Command of our Governours, as an Instance of our Obedience to them, which God hath made our Duty, and that for *Conscience* sake.

That Action therefore which is natural and indifferent, convenient and reverent, and upon those Accounts commanded and enjoyned; I would fain know where doth the *Unlawfulness* of it lie, or where is the *Sin* of such an Action to be found?

They therefore that shall scruple Kneeling at the S. Sacrament, especially since our Church hath assured them,

them, that there is no intention of adoring the Elements, or the ſuppoſed Preſence of Chriſt's Body, I fear, underſtand not, what Reverence and Devotion is, ſo well as they ought; but diſcover ſomething of a Temper, which if left looſe, would be troubleſome and uneaſie under all Government and Diſcipline, tho' never ſo ſo *pure* and *primitive*, notwithſtanding they ſeem ſuch Zealous Contenders for it.

But pray, why ſhould a Lawful Authority be blamed, for doing that which particular Men, and private Teachers do daily practiſe in their ſeveral Meetings, and Illegal Aſſemblies, namely, impoſing upon the *Conſciences* of Men, and requiring their Submiſſion to ſeveral things, which they have no expreſs Rule for in Scripture, and yet make this the great Objection againſt the Worſhip and *Diſcipline* of our Church; in which reſpect they are no leſs *Magiſterial*, if not more, than our Governors, whom upon all occaſions they Arraign *as ſuch*; for without any Authority from God or the Magiſtrate, they exerciſe an *Arbitrary Dominion* over the *Conſciences* of thoſe Men, who have weakneſs enough to litt themſelves into their *Party*: They take away the nature of things indifferent, and make ſome things neceſſary, which were not ſo before, and ſome things they can diſpenſe withal as indifferent, which are neceſſarily required, to the enſnaring of Peoples *Conſciences*, who otherwiſe it may be, mean well, and are too honeſt to ſuſpect the bottom of their deſigns, as I might inſtance both in the Claſſical and Congregational way: Whereas our Church never pretended to alter the nature of things, either neceſſary and eſſential to Religion, or only accidental and indifferent, but leaves them as they are: She only directs the Practice of them ſo far as they tend to *Order* and *Decency*, are expreſſive of *Reverence* and

De-

Devotion, and become a proof of *Obedience* and *Submission*, to lawful Authority; a *Duty* which I cannot think so meanly of as some do, considering how peremptorily it is enjoined by the Holy Ghost in many places of the Gospel, and the great *Influence* it hath upon the Peace of the Church and Security of the Government, under which we live.

Secondly, *Conscience* I told you includes Knowledge as much in the Notion of the thing, as Composition of the word; where there is no Knowledge, there can be no *Conscience*, because in such a case it is without a Rule, and *consequently* at a loss, not knowing what to do, or how to govern it self and judge aright; whereupon *Conscience* is not so much concern'd about things that are uncertain, whereof we can have no sure Proof or clear Evidence, either from Sense, Reason, or Revelation, which are the three only ways of attaining Knowledge, or arriving at the certainty of any thing.

Thus in matters of School Question or Controversial Divinity, which are banded to and fro with probable Arguments on both sides: For Instance, Whether the Fire in Hell be Material or Metaphorical, true in the *Letter* or in a *Figure*, so we do but believe there is such a place as Hell reserved for the Punishment of Wicked Men, as Scripture doth assure us, *Conscience*, as to the rest, is not concern'd to believe either one way or other; because Scripture is silent in the case, and the Arguments from Reason on either hand are alike probable; and if I am induc'd to believe one part of the Question rather than the other, this can arise no higher, than to a private Opinion of my own, not a publick Article of my *Christian Faith*, wherein my private Judgment not my *Conscience* is concern'd. That Christ was born of a Pure Virgin is

matter

matter of Faith, and *consequently* of *Conscience* to believe, because Scripture doth affirm it; but whether she remain'd so all her Life long, is not so: Indeed it hath been an Opinion in the Church, that she did, but however there is no other Argument but that of *Piè Credimus*, that can induce us to be of that mind.

In like manner the Descent of Christ into Hell, so we do not deny the thing, which hath for many Ages been a received Article of the Apostles Creed, tho left out in some others, it matters not greatly, whether it were *Local* or *Virtual*, *Metaphorical*, or *Metonymical*: for in all these several Senses it hath been taken by Learned and Pious Men; but in which of these we need not be overmuch concern'd; for this Article being not expressly Revealed, or clearly delivered in Scripture, we believe it chiefly upon the account of the Apostles Creed, whose Antiquity ought to command our *Reverence* and *Respect*, tho I think it cannot strictly oblige my *Conscience*; especially when the Church hath not determin'd any thing in the Case (any more than Scripture) but left me at Liberty to judge either way as I see cause. The like may be said of the Knowledge of the Saints departed, with many others, which for Brevity sake I now omit.

Thirdly, Some things there are, tho for certain Revealed, yet being *Obscure* and *Unintelligible* in their own nature, cannt so immediately oblige our *Consciences*, as those that are more *plain* and *Obvious*.

The *Decrees* of God, *Arcana* of *Providence*, the great and Stupendous *Mystery* of the *Blessed Trinity*, and *Incomprehensible Union* of the Two Natures in the *Son* of *God*; these are, in many things, above our Reach and Capacity, and so far as they are above us, belong not to us. A modest and humble Faith is here requisite, and all that is expected from the common

and

and ordinary sort of *Christians*; a too curious search and inquiry into these Venerable Mysteries being not *convenient* for all, nor *absolutely necessary* for any.

A particular Explication of them, concerns my Faith no further than as it is consonant to Sacred Scripture, and agreeable to what is more plainly revealed in Holy Writ; or else by natural and genuine Consequence, may be deduced there-from.

But now, as for other Difficulties that may arise from thence, I am not bound to pin my Faith on any one man's Sleeve, nor receive his *Scheme*, or *Hypothesis*, ὡς θεόπνευστος, for *inspir'd Doctrine*: No, nor for *Truth* neither, any further than he can confirm it by Scripture, which is the sole infallible Test of Divine Truth: All that in this Case I am oblig'd to do, is to guide my *Conscience* by *Scripture*, and my *Judgment* by the *catholick Determinations* of the Church, that is, I am oblig'd in Conscience to believe all that the Scripture reveals, and make that the Rule of my Faith and Obedience: But in all other things where difficulties may arise, and Scripture is either totally silent, or very obscure, here we ought to believe as the Church believes; mistake me not, I do not speak it in a Popish Sence, which sets up the *Tradition* of the Church in Opposition to *Scripture*; and in an impious manner, prefers them before it, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men; but my meaning is, that I, and every body else, in matters dubious and obscure, ought to be so modest as to mistrust our own particular Judgments, rather than that of the Church, and submit our *Private* Opinions to her *Publick* Determinations: If not, yet the *least* that in this Case we ought to do, is to keep our Persuasion to our selves, rather than disturb the Peace, or oppose the received Doctrine of the Church, out of an indiscreet Zeal for any fond or affected Opinion of our own. For pray consider, Can it be any other than Pride, or Self-conceit, to call it no worse, for a few private per-

ſons to oppoſe their particular *Sentiments* to the *Catholick Faith*, and what they decry in their Governors to practiſe more unjuſtly themſelves, by *Preſcribing* to their Superiors in Matters dubious and uncertain, and which are perpetually controverted on all hands?

In all things of this nature *Conſcience* obligeth me to be Humble and Modeſt rather than Poſitive and Peremptory; and therefore it would better become us to receive our Faith *from*, than impoſe ours *upon* the Church in whoſe Communion we live, and of the Truth of whoſe Doctrine we are ſatisfied in the main, as the *Diſſenting Brethren* are generally with ours. But however, if they ſee Reaſon to *Diſſent* in their private Thoughts from the Eſtabliſht Faith, they ought to keep their Judgment to themſelves, and not diſturb her Peace on that account: In this Senſe let them remember that of the Apoſtle, *He that hath Faith, let him have it to himſelf. And he that keeps it there, may keep it ſafe enough, and out of the reach of all Humane Power and Compulſion.* For *Conſcience*, while it keeps within its due bounds cannot, ought not, to be compell'd by any Power upon Earth; for in that reſpect it is free, and never to be forc't.

But *Secondly*, and poſitively, *Conſcience* is chiefly and more immediately concern'd about ſuch things as are more *neceſſary* and *ſubſtantial*, *plain* and *obvious* in *Religion*.

And theſe in the *Firſt* place are the Main *Fundamental* Articles of our *Chriſtian Faith*, which conſtitute the greateſt part of our *Creed*, and have an immediate *influence* on our Lives, and they are thoſe that are contain'd in our ſeveral Creeds, which are the brief Summary of the *Chriſtian Doctrine*, and comprehenſive of the moſt Material Articles of our Belief.

And *Secondly*, Matters of *Practice*, which are leſs controverted than Matters of *Doctrine*, and are agreed unto on all hands, and to which all the Articles of our Faith ought to refer, and are no further neceſſary than they do

ſo:

ſo: For all *Notions and Opinions* are but things indifferent in themſelves; it matters not whether they be true or falſe, if they paſs no further than the Brain, and are of no other uſe than to gratifie a *Muſing Genius* and *Speculative Fancy*. For to what purpoſe is the Belief of a God, if we live without him in the World? But they are of great Moment and Concern in relation to Practice; ſo far as they paſs from the Head to the Heart and have an *Influence* upon our Lives: Truth therefore is valuable and ought to be highly priz'd, becauſe of its near Relation to Virtue and Goodneſs, and *Errour* to be ſhunn'd and avoided in regard of its vicious Contagion, and the ill effect it hath upon our Morals.

Conſcience therefore is concern'd principally about ſuch things in *Religion* as are ſolid and ſubſtantial, plain and evident, neceſſary to be done, certain and eaſie to be known; and ſuch, for the moſt part, are the *Agenda* or Matters of Practice, which take in all the *Inſtances* of our Duty toward God and Man, and branch themſelves forth into the great Commands of *leading a Godly, Righteous, and Sober Life.*

As for the more Ignorant ſort of People, and ſuch as are Weak in the Faith, we ſhould preſs upon them the great and neceſſary Duties of Religion and Morality, ſuch as the Fear of God, Loyalty to their King, Love to their Neighbour, Honeſty in their Dealings, Temperance and Sobriety towards themſelves, A Thankful uſe and acknoledgment of Mercies, and a Patient-Bearing and Improvement of Affliction. Theſe we ought daily to preſs upon our People, rather than amuſe them with Curious Notions, or receive them to doubtful Diſputations which oft ſtagger more than they confirm, and ſhake their Faith inſtead of ſettling it: And tho the Apoſtle bids us, *Prove all things and hold faſt that which is good*, Theſſal. 5. 21. Yet this is not ſpoken to all indifferently; it belongs not to the Ordinary and leſs knowing ſort of *Chriſtians*, who

are usually uncapable of such an Inquiry, but to such who have *Leisure* and *Opportunity* to make the Tryal, *Judgment* and *Skill*, to go through with it, or to do it to better purpose, and with less danger to themselves and others: But for the Generality of People, where they are satisfied, that no *Sin* is imposed on their Practice, nor dangerous *Errour* on their Belief, where they have the means of Grace and *Salvation* afforded them, constant *Hours* of *Devotion*, and stated Times of Publick Worship, where they have the Liberty and *Encouragement* to be as *Holy* and *Devout* as they will, as Virtuous and *Strict* in their *Morals* as they please themselves; In this case, (which God be praised is ours) People ought to rest satisfied in the *Communion* of such a Church, without troubling themselves with needless *Scruples*, uncomfortable *Doubts*, or superstitious *Curiosities*, which are apt to take up too much of their Time and Thoughts, that might be better employed in the Practice of well-known and necessary Duties, and improving themselves in the happy Progress of a good and vertuous Life: And if *such a* Church will not satisfie them, I know not (all things considered) where they can find a better: For no Church under the Sun is absolutely perfect and free from corruptions and defects; nor can ever hope to be so, as long as it is made up of Men, that is, of Persons frail and fallible, and of like Passions and Infirmities with the rest of the World; tho' I do believe this Church of ours hath *as few* of them as any other under the Cope of Heaven: Nay, I should not mistake if I said *much fewer*.

Conscience then is more to be heeded in reference to our Actings than Opinions; and 'tis more safe and easie to govern our Actions in respect of Practice, than to chuse for our selves in point of Doctrine. If a man holds no Doctrine that is prejudicial to *Holiaess* and *a good Life*, he need not be much troubled about other things that are too high for him, and above his Reach, I dare adventure

to

to ſay, 'tis ſafer for him to err with Modeſty and Humility, out of Love to the Churches Peace, and in ſubmiſſion to its Authority, than to be ſound and orthodox in his Judgment, and withal, of a ſtubborn, refractory, and contentious Spirit: And a humble, modeſt, peaceable-minded Man is more acceptable with his Errors and Failings in Judgment, than a proud and obſtinate perſon, tho' he chance to have Truth on his Side: Therefore according to the common uſe and acceptation of the Word, he is lookt upon as moſt *Conſcientious*, who lives beſt, and not who knows moſt; who is juſt and honeſt in his Morals, not who is ſound and right in his Apprehenſions. He that lives well, tho' he knows not very much, hath more of *Conſcience*, than he that knows more, and yet lives a great deal worſe: For *Conſcience* is not ſo much a *Speculative*, as *Practical* thing; and many times there is more of it found among the ſimple, honeſt, and well-meaning ſort of Chriſtians, than among the more deeply learned, and profound *Speculati*.

This ſhows the too great folly and perverſeneſs of many of our People, who ſeem to be eaten up with *Zeal*, and plead *Conſcience* in thoſe things which they do not well underſtand, and it may be never will; whereas a Meek, Humble, and Teachable Spirit would better become them, and tend much more to their own Praiſe, and the Churches Peace; and be more agreeable to the Rules of the Goſpel, and the great Ends of Religion: For they may ſooner hope to be the one than the other, that is, they may become Humble and Meek, when they cannot be skill'd in all the points of Religion, or matters controverted, and under diſpute.

Conſcience then is moſt properly exerciſed about the more plain and neceſſary Duties of Religion, namely, matters of Practice, and ſuch Doctrines as tend more immediately toward the *leading of a godly, righteous, and ſober Life.*

And thus have I done with the fourth General Head, and

and which I chiefly intended in the drawing up of this Discourse.

It remains now, that in the

5*th.* AND last place, to offer a few things by way of *Advice* concerning the well-governing our selves with relation to our *Consciences*; and the

First is this, That you be very careful to get *Conscience* rightly informed, and well instructed, that you may arrive at a clear and distinct Apprehension of your Duty in all Capacities, and under all Relations whatever, and *Do this* with all the Faithfulness and impartiality in the world, being sway'd by passion, byas'd by Interest, and carried away with prejudice as little as may be.

Labour to know, and be Instructed in the Truth for *Truths-sake*, not so much to set your Head, as your Heart right, not to furnish you with matter of Talk and Dispute, which evermore engenders *Strife* and *Envy*; but to understand your Duty, in order to the faithful practice and performance of it. Now this you must do, before you can safely follow the Dictates of *Conscience*, or relie upon the Testimony thereof. In order hereunto, you ought to consider the Nature and Extent of the Rule, by which *Conscience* is to be govern'd and directed in all her Actions and Undertakings; and this, I told you, is the *Word of God*, which, laying aside all prejudice and partiality, you ought diligently to *take heed*, and *attend* unto; and where Doubts and Difficulties may arise, to consult and advise with your *Teachers*, whom God hath set over you, or with any other whom you have reason to judge most eminent for their Piety, Learning, Prudence and Integrity: to beg their Assistance, and receive their Instructions, with that Modesty and Respect as becomes *Learners* and *Disciples*, who desire nothing more than to *come to the Knowledge of the Truth, that they might be saved.*

For want of this Care *Conscience* hath been strangely misled,

miſled, and run it ſelf into many groſs Errors, and foul Miſtakes. Thus many have been prompted to very ill things, one while by Paſſion, another while by Prejudice, and a third, by a corrupt and ſelf-Intereſt; and yet have thought they have been led by *Zeal*, and acted by *Conſcience* all the while, when, as upon ſtrict enquiry, they have found their *Zeal* was not according to Knowledge, and what they call'd *Conſcience*, in no wiſe agreeable to the Rules of their Religion. For the avoiding of which, we ſhould endeavour as much as in us lies, to get our *Conſciences* well inform'd, and to uſe the means in order thereunto.

Secondly, If you would have *Conſcience* to be rightly inform'd, you muſt endeavour after a humble, meek, and teacheable Spirit: *For it is ſaid, the meek will he guide in Judgment, and the meek he will teach his way*, Pſalm 25.9. And it is ſaid, *God reſiſts the proud, but gives Grace to the humble*, 1 Pet. 5. 5.

Now the meek and humble ſtand higheſt in Gods Grace and Favour; and therefore more likely to be made acquainted with his Mind and Will: Nay, they are naturally moſt capable of Inſtruction, and beſt fitted for it, as being moſt deſirous to know their Duty, and ſubmit to it when they have done.

Whereas on the other hand, Pride, and Paſſion, and Self-conceit, are apt to puff men up, prejudice them againſt the Truth, and fill them with Scorn and Contempt of the beſt Counſel and Advice in the World. A peeviſh and froward Diſpoſition, makes men impatient of Contradiction, and to mis-judge every thing that thwarts their particular Sentiments, inſomuch as the beſt Advice is commonly loſt and thrown away upon ſuch *perverſe* Tempers, tho' offered in never ſo kind and charitable a manner.

Thirdly, After *Conſcience* is *well* inform'd, keep it cloſe to its Rule, and do not ſuffer it wilfully or wantonly

to

to ſwerve from it upon any account, or under any pretence whatever, otherwiſe it may be in danger to ſeduce and deceive.

Conſcience is chiefly exerciſed about *good* or *evil*, the doing of the one, and the avoiding of the other. Now, tho' the Word of God is the great Standing Rule, according to which we ought to take our principal Meaſures of good and evil; yet this difference is more early taught us by the Light of Nature, and the Suggeſtion of our own Minds; and therefore whatever appears a Sin, or is univerſally condemn'd for ſuch, by that Law, *Conſcience* muſt needs judge it to be a Sin too, and believe it condemn'd likewiſe by the Word of God: For no natural (or rather *unnatural*) Crime can poſſibly commence a religious Duty; and to think otherwiſe, is to lie under one of the groſſeſt Deluſions, and ſcandalous Miſtakes: For hereby we ſet the two Laws, to wit, that of *Nature* and *Revelation* in oppoſition to one another; yea, we make them abſolutely inconſiſtent and contradictory, tho' both of them at firſt came from God.

Conſcience therefore ought not to plead for, or encourage the Practice of any Sin, namely which appears to be ſo by the Light of Nature, as well as Religion; and therefore all Treaſons and Rebellions, Murders, and Conſpiracies, Sacrilege and Perjury are great Sins, and ſuch as are diſcern'd to be ſo by natural Light; and therefore can never become otherwiſe, however they may be palliated, or pleaded for: Never think that the Plea of *Conſcience*, *Religion*, or *Reformation*, can juſtifie a wicked or immoral Action, ſuch as Rebellion and Perjury, which all Mankind doth naturally acknowledge and condemn for ſuch.

Now every man almoſt hath ſo much of the Law of Nature yet left within him, as to diſcern the great Evil of ſuch things, tho' not always to *ſhun*, yet to *condemn* the Guilt thereof.

Whatever

What ever Nature tells us is a Sin, *Conſcience* for that very reaſon muſt diſapprove of it too, becauſe the Religion of Chriſt is but the Law of Nature perfected and improved; and therefore no pretence of *Conſcience* drawn from Scripture can make that to be lawful, or ceaſe to be a Sin which was ſo before. Now if God's Law obligeth not to Sin, much leſs the private Dictates, or impulſe of *Conſcience*, which ought evermore to make that her Rule, and fetch all her Directions from thence.

For a man therefore to allow himſelf in the Commiſſion of ſuch *crimes* as all Laws and Religions in the World muſt needs condemn as impious and wicked, pray what *Conſcience* hath ſuch a Man? But then to *plead Conſcience* in favour of ſuch things is ſo much the worſe ſtill, and renders his Crime infinitely more wicked and abominable. Such a man is never to be excuſed in what he doth of this nature: For his Excuſe, inſtead of extenuating, doth but adde to his Guilt, and mightily aggravate the Heinouſneſs thereof.

Fourthly, That, while I am pleading for *Conſcience*, I may impartially diſcharge my own; *Conſcience* ought not to be ſeparate from *Charity*, any more than from *Truth*. *Love*, *Charity* and *Good-will*, are the chief *Goſpel-Precepts* and *Standing Principles* of Chriſt's Religion: And all *Zeal* for the Church or State; Nay, for the Chriſtian Religion in general, or reformed Religion in particular, if void of Charity, is little worth. Charity, I mean, not only for thoſe of our own Communion, but even towards them that differ from us: For ſo far as they do it purely on the account of *Conſcience*, and no otherwiſe, we ought to retain ſome Charity for them, be they of what Church or Communion they will.

Indeed where *Conſcience* is *manifeſtly* abuſed, and carries them to any thing that is wicked and unlawful; where any Sin or Immorality is countenanc'd or encouraged, under the Notion or Plea of *Conſcience*, there we muſt leave

 them,

them, and deservedly too, to the Publick *Censures* of the Church, and *Punishment* of the State: but where 'tis mere *Conscience*, and not *Faction* or *Peevishness* that makes the Difference, there our Charity is as much due to them, as it is owing from them to us upon the like occasion: For in this case there is but one *Rule* for them and us to walk and judge by.

Therefore let a man be never so much in the right: let his *Zeal* for Truth be never so great, yet if his *Zeal* doth devour his *Charity*, sowre and corrupt his Spirit, embitter and provoke him beyond what is seemly and convenient, let his Cause be never so good, his Arguments never so strong, if they fail in this, all the rest signifies not much; the lack of this one thing makes all the rest defective, and for the most part unsuccessful: For let me appeal to the most zealous *Boarmarges* of them all, can any man, who believes the Scripture, read the 13th Chapter of St. *Paul*'s first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, which treats purposely on the necessity and commendation of this most excellent Grace of Charity? I say, can he read that, and yet think it possible to be a good Christian, or discharge a good *Conscience* without it? For doth he not prefer it to the Tongues of Men and Angels; to the Gift of Prophecy, and working of Miracles? Nay, doth he not prefer Charity before the most comprehensive Knowledge, miraculous Faith, liberal Alms-deeds, and voluntary Martyrdom? 1 *Cor.* 3. 1. &c. *Tho' I speak with the Tongue of Men or Angels, tho' I have the gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries, and all Knowledge, and tho' I have all Faith, and tho' I bestow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and tho' I give my Body to be burnt, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

Now the Excellency and Advantage which Charity hath over all other Gifts of God's Holy Spirit, is proved at large from the wonderful good Offices and Effects thereof. *Charity suffers long, and is kind, envies not, vaunteth not it self, is not puft up, nor easily provoked*

It

It rejoyceth in nothing but the *Truth*; it *bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things*; and therefore in the Concluſion he gives Charity the Preference of all others, *Verſe.* 13. *Now abideth Faith, Hope, and Charity, theſe three, but the greateſt of theſe is Charity.*

Our Religion and conſequently our Church, though ſhe condemn Diviſions and Separations in all thoſe that leave off, and depart from her Communion; yet doth not wholly exclude them from her Charity, and therefore neither ſhould we from ours, meerly upon the Difference of Opinion, and eſpecially, if this Difference be for *Conſcience* ſake, and not out of *Faction* and *Frowardneſs* as I ſaid before, and would always be underſtood.

And that I may not be thought to ſpeak without book, or affirm more then our Church will own, I ſhall refer you to that excellent piece call'd, *The Moderation of the Church of England*; out of which I have collected a few Paſſages, ſome whereof I have repeated more at large.

Queen Elizabeth in her Injunctions, 1559. declares that [Her Majeſty being moſt deſirous of all other Earthly things, that her people ſhould live in Charity, both towards God and Man, and therein abound in good works, Willeth and ſtraightly Commandeth all her Subjects to forbear all vain and contentious Diſputation in matters of Religion, and not to uſe in deſpite or rebuke of any Perſon, theſe Convitious (or *Reviling*) words of *Papiſt, Heretick, Satiſmatick or Sacramentary*, or any ſuch like expreſſions of Reproach] that is, we ought not to uſe theſe or the like Expreſſions in way of Reproach or vilifying of one another, as ſome in the heat of their wrangling and Contention are very apt to do, to the exaſperating rather than convincing of Gainſayers.

And King *James*, that Learned and Judicious Prince forbids [*Pulpits* to be made *Paſquills.*] And gave in charge to the Archbiſhop [That no Preacher of any Denomination whatſoever, ſhall preſume to fall into bitter Invectives, and undecent Railings againſt the Perſons of either *Papiſts* or *Puritans*; but modeſtly and gravely, when they are occaſioned by their Text, free both the Doctrine and Diſcipline of the Church of *England* from the Aſperſions of the Adverſaries.]

To which we may add that memorable Paſſage out of Arch-biſhop *Laud.* [The Church of *England*] (ſaith he) is not ſuch a Shrew to her Children as to deny her Bleſſing, ordenounce an *Anathema* againſt them, if ſome peacebly diſſent in ſome particulars remoter from the Foundation.]

And in the *Homily* againſt Contention, *Serm.* 1. We are exhorted therein, [ſo to read the Scripture, that by reading thereof we may be made the *better Livers* rather than the more *Contentious Diſputers.* And if any thing be neceſſary to be taught, Reaſon'd, and Diſputed, let us do it with all Meekneſs, Softneſs, and Lenity, *&c.* For it is better to give place Meekly, then to win the Victory with the breach of Charity, *&c.*

And again, We cannot be joyn'd to Chriſt our Head, except we be glued with Concord and Charity one to another. For he that is not of this Unity, is not of the Church of Chriſt, which is a Congregation or Unity together, and not a diviſion, *&c.*

But for the Readers further ſatisfaction therein, if he deſires it, I ſhall refer him to the Book it ſelf, above mentioned, where the Learned Author gives an account of the Churches great *Charity* and *Moderation* throughout all the Parts and Branches of her Conſtitution which beſpeaks her of a truly *Chriſtian* and *Primitive* Temper, wherein I wiſh all her Children would follow and Imitate her: And thereby ſet an Example to all thoſe

that

that are otherwiſe minded, or diſſent from our Church in *this*, as well as in other Inſtances of their Duty.

For methinks thoſe that would ſet up for ſerious, Conſcientious Perſons, ought not to break the bond of Chriſtian Charity, nor paſs the bounds of the Churches Moderation, by indulging their paſſions, or giving way to a peeviſh, froward, and Invidious Humour againſt all that differ from them in matters of Faith, and Doctrine, or purely out of Judgment, *and Conſcience*,

For I could never yet be perſwaded that Railing, and ill Language againſt *Papiſts* on the one hand, or *Diſſenters* on the other, is or ought to be a Diſtinguiſhing Character of a truly Loyal Son of the Church; ſpecially when I conſider that moſt of thoſe that are addicted thereunto, are leaſt capable of convincing them otherways: Or if they are, yet this ſeems the moſt unlikely way they can take for the doing of it, for we are told, *That the wrath of Man worketh not the Righteouſneſs of God*, James 1. 20.

Now if you would ſee the *Indecency* and Unſeemlyneſs, of ill Language and reproachful Speeches, I need but remind you of the Rude and Slovenly Expreſſions, that are commonly uſed, and with a great deal of Venome ſpit in the Face of our Church.

They can hardly find any other name for a *Surpliſs*, than that of a Superſtitious Rag and Relick of *Popery*; tho' there may be more *Popery* and Superſtition in their conceipt about it, then in the thing it ſelf; for ſuperſtition is not in the Object, but only in the mind or conceipt of the Perſon that thinks ſo.

Thus they have accuſtomed to revile our Liturgy under the notion of the *Engliſh Maſs-book*, the Biſhops and Governours of our Church are branded for *Limbs of Antichriſt*, and the Church her ſelf reputed for little better then *Antichriſtian* and *Idolatrous*: Neither have they learnt to ſtop here; but have adventured to fly in the

Face

Face of the *Civil Government* as well as the Eccleſiaſtical, againſt both which they have Shot their Venemous *Arrows, even bitter words. Pſalm.* 64. 3.

But now I appeal to any ſober and ſerious Perſon, be he of what Perſwaſion he will, whether this be according to the Principles of the *Chriſtian Religion*, which is Profeſt in common by us all, or whether it is purely *Conſcience* which puts them upon ſuch unſeemly Practices; or is this Language fit to be beſtowed upon one of the moſt *Eminent* and *Famous* among all the Reformed Churches, and who, [without Vanity be it ſpoken,] hath been, one of the greateſt *Bulworks* againſt *Popery*, and *Champion* for the *Reformation*, and I hope, and pray daily it will continue to be ſo as long as God ſhall be pleaſed to continue Her or Himſelf a Church upon Earth.

Now if Language of this Nature, tho' ariſing from the great and extraordinary Zeal of our Adverſaries, is ſo unhandſome and ill becoming in them towards us, why ſhould we think it any whit the more commendable and ſeemely in us toward them, or out of our mouths then out of theirs? That which is *Evil* and *Offenſive* in it ſelf, is and will be ſo, let who will be guilty of it.

Wherefore methinks it would be more like Chriſtian, and make more for the credit of *Religion* and Honour of our Church, if we had more Charity and Kindneſs one for another, even in thoſe things, wherein we differ, ſo they be not Factious or Scandalous, nor have an ill influence on our Lives and Manners, rather than imitate the Example of ſome of our hot-headed *Diſſenters* in ſome of their *worſt Qualities*, to wit, in their Uncharitable Cenſures, and *Unchriſtian Revilings* and Calumnies. For the bitter and fiery Spirit of a *Jewiſh Zealot*, is very unagreeable to the Meek, and Gentle Diſpoſition of a true follower and Diſciple of Chriſt, according

ing to St. *Luke* 9. 54, 55. *And when his Disciples,* James *and* John *saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we Command Fire to come down from Heaven, and consume them, even as* Elias did. *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of.* And I shall be beholding to any man that shall be able to make out any other sence and meaning thereof.

5*thly* A good *Christian* ought to live according to his own *Conscience*, rather then according to the *Opinion* of other Men. Be sure that man lives with the most comfort and content to himself, who walks by the constant Rule of *Gods Word*, and not by that of the *World*, which consists chiefly in *Humour* and *Opinion*, and alters almost every day, and upon the least Occasion. Whereas the Law of God is a sure and standing Rule, which being diligently heeded and attended unto, will not suffer us to go wrong or mistake our way.

'Tis impossible a man should live so Regular in all respects, or carry himself so universally blameless and inoffensive, as to gain the good Word and Opinion of all men, tho' he should make it his chief study or sole business to do so; for men's Humours and Interests being so different and many times so contrary, that which likes one, doth not like another, and what this man commends, another may be apt to find fault withal.

Nay, one and the same person is not always consistent with himself, nor can keep long in the same mind: His thoughts and Judgments of things do often alter with his Affection and Interest, and notwithstanding the *Reason* of things remains one and the same, yet his *Opinion* of them may not do so, and then they will be sure to pass their Censures on mens Persons and Actions, according as they are in good or bad Humour, or as they judge, may make most for their present Interest.

Now he undertakes a hard task indeed, who Studies to please those, whose minds are so fickle and wavering, and whose Humours are made up of such sudden Contradictions.

The

The People of the World are Masters of our Credit and Reputation, which they may give or take from us at pleasure, as many times they do upon very slight or no ground at all: They depend upon the Opinion, which men are pleased to conceive of us, which they may alter when they list, whether we give cause for it, or no.

But now no man or Number of men can be Masters of our *Consciences*; we may keep them innocent and in Peace, let the World say or do what she can: For tho' the deserved *Commendation* of a Virtuous Action depends upon the Good Will of others; yet the *Satisfaction* it inwardly creates, is a *Good* they have nothing to do withal, and can never deprive us of, tho' they would. It concerns us therefore to take all the care we can of our *Consciences*, and study rather to approve our selves to *them*, than to the Multitude, the one being Practicable, when the other is not.

Not that I would have any man careless of his Credit and good Name, for he that is not tender of his Fame, will hardly be so of his *Conscience*; and the Reputation which is given to Virtuous Deeds, ought to be lookt upon as no small Incitement to the performance of them. But my meaning is, no man ought to be so Studious of Popular Applause, or affect the good Opinion of the World, by such mean and unworthy Arts, as may tend to the Injuring of his *Conscience*, or prejudice of his Duty, which he ows to God and the Church, to his Prince or Countrey. But let a man do, what he thinks in his *Conscience* he ought to do, let him *provide things honest in the sight of all men*, run into no open Scandal, give no just or wilful cause of offence, and avoid as much as he can all Temptations or Provocations to evil, and then he ought not, he need not value the *Talk of the World, nor Speech of People.*

A Wise man, which in *Solomon's* sense is a *Prudent, Good* man, should first take care of doing his Duty, and then

then live above the ſpiteful Talk and Reports of the Vulgar, or regard their Cenſures no otherwiſe, then the Moon in the Fable did the barking of a Dog, which neither obſcur'd her Light, nor made her alter her Courſe. No, no, The inward content, which a man receives in the doing of a good Action is infinitely to be prefer'd before the Credit and Reputation, which it gains him abroad; an Unwiſe man ſeeks his Reward and Satisfaction, where it is not to be found, namely from *without*, in the *Goods* and *Poſſeſſions*, in the Modes and Opinions of the World; but a good man finds it *within* himſelf, in the *Right Order* and *Government* of his Mind aud Paſſions, and in the *Teſtimony* and *Approbation* of God and his own *Conſcience*.

2*d*. Again, it concerns us not only to Live, but to Value our ſelves, and judge of our Eſtate towards God, according to the Teſtimony of *Conſcience*, rather than by the Fancy or Opinion which men are pleaſed to conceive of us.

The generality of men, Eſteem and Value themſelves according to the *Good* or *Evil*, that befalls them in the World, and happens to them in their outward Concerns.

If they are Sick or in Pain, in Poverty or Diſtreſs, under Misfortune or Diſgrace, they commonly bemoan their Condition, Lament their Miſerable Eſtate, and are apt to think themſelves the moſt Unfortunate Wretches of all others; When as all this hath befallen the very Beſt of men, who yet have been Happy amidſt the greateſt outward Misfortune, as long as they kept ſafe their Innocence, Anſwered the end of Affliction, and made an entire Reſignation of themſelves and their concerns unto the Will of God: And ſo long as a man doth this, he can never be Miſerable, neither ſhould he think himſelf ſo, let things go never ſo croſs, let the World Cenſure never ſo hard, or Reflect never ſo ſpiteful and ſevere.

Alas, *Happineſs* and *Miſery* is not to be meaſured by the *Good* or *Evil*, that befalls the Body, by Proſperity or Adverſity, by good Report or bad Report; otherwiſe who would be Innocent, or where ſhall we find a good man upon Earth, who hath eſcaped the Laſh of the tongue, or hath not been ill treated and miſrepreſented in one kind or other: I never yet did hear of ſuch a Perſon, and quite deſpair of ever doing ſo; and yet if meer Calumnies and Reproaches can make a man Guilty, then our Bleſſed Saviour muſt have been one of the Vileſt Creatures upon Earth; For no man could be more heavily Charg'd, and ſpitefully revil'd, and yet deſerve it leſs then he did, and all this from his own malicious Countrey-men the *Jews* and upon the account of their Religion too.

But, God be praiſed, theſe things are not the *meaſure* of Guilt or Innocence: The beſt men would be moſt hardly dealt withal, were it in the power of the World to diſpenſe out their Rewards or Puniſhments. Guilt and Unhappineſs do not hang upon the Scandalous Tongues of Men, nor ſoar upon the Wings of Fame, neither do they flow from the Invidious Talk of Raſh and prejudiced People; but they have their Seat and Abode in the mind: As long as there is Peace in the *Conſcience*, and Innocence in the Soul, 'tis not in the Power of man or any thing under the Sun to make ſuch a Perſon better or worſe, *more* or *leſs* Innocent or Guilty, Happy or Miſerable. For notwithſtanding all the ill things that may be ſaid or thought of ſuch a one, yet at the ſame time the Teſtimony of a good *Conſcience* is able to make amends for all: And notwithſtanding the *Reproaches of the wicked* may fall upon him; yet this is a *Continual Feaſt* ever at hand to welcome and entertain him, a rich Cordial to chear and revive him, being moreover the Pledge and Earneſt of a more *Ample Reward*.

Which

Which God of his Infinite mercy, Prepare us for, and bring us unto in his own due time, and that for the ſake of his beloved Son and our moſt Bleſſed *Redeemer, Chriſt Jeſus the Righteous, to whom with the* Father *and* Holy *Spirit, be Aſcribed as is moſt due, all Honour and Glory, Praiſe and Adoration, now and for ever more,* Amen, Amen.

FINIS.